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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4868
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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0914
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RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 2140
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 4444
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 005880

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: PINHEIRO TELLS DIPLOMATS IN BANGKOK TRIP TO BURMA
"WORTHWHILE"

REF: A. BANGKOK 5849

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1111

BANGKOK 00005880 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Classified by: Charge d, Affaires a.i. James F. Entwistle
, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) UN Special Rapporteur Paulo Pinheiro explained to Bangkok-based Western diplomats on November 16 that his recent trip to Burma had been "worthwhile." He described his interviews with five detained political prisoners as revealing and stressed his efforts to encourage GOB officials to permit the return of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). He was encouraged by possible openings for cooperation with law enforcement authorities, instead of the military. However, Pinheiro was "appalled" by the callous position of the senior abbots of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (the state governing body of the Buddhist clergy in Burma), who called the monks that participated in the September demonstrations "renegades." Sanctions would accomplish very little unless the sanctions were universal, he deemed, which would be difficult to achieve given opposition by "the entire region." The remaining content of Pinheiro's briefing tracked with what he had told the Ambassador over lunch earlier that same day (ref A). End Summary.

POLITICAL PRISONERS AND RETURN OF ICRC

¶2. (C) In a closed November 16 meeting with Western diplomats based in Bangkok, Professor Paulo Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, provided a detailed readout of his November 11-15 mission to Burma. During his second visit to Insein Prison on November 15, Pinheiro held one-on-one meetings with five political prisoners (ref A). Pinheiro recalled the detainees' morale as being filled with high expectations about Pinheiro's visit mixed with skepticism about prospects for change. Min Zeya and Than Tin (aka Kyi Than), both '88 generation students, stated that they concurred with the call from the international community to release political prisoners, but emphasized that it should be an all or none scenario.

¶3. (C) Pinheiro indicated that his meeting with Su Su Nwe, a prominent labor and human rights activist arrested the day before Pinheiro's visit to the prison, had given him valuable insights. She claimed to have witnessed the deaths of innocent civilians and monks at the hand of the Burmese security forces and was prepared to remain in prison and be subjected to cruel treatment for the information she shared with Pinheiro. Although Pinheiro opted not to disclose additional details of their conversation, he assured the group that they would be included in his final report.

¶4. (C) Pinheiro also emphasized the steps he had taken to encourage the return of ICRC to Burma. He stated that he repeatedly made this point in meetings with various officials, and emphasized that the GOB's allowing ICRC into

BANGKOK 00005880 002.2 OF 003

Burma was the only efficient way to improve the country's penal system. The police voiced support to Pinheiro for an ICRC role in improving the penal system and Pinheiro planned to capitalize on this in future dealings with the GOB on the issue. An ambassador from an EU country who recently visited Insein Prison and met with senior police officials concurred with Pinheiro's observation about the police. This same ambassador commented at the briefing that there may exist an exploitable divergence of views between the police and military services on the issue of ICRC's return to Burma.

SANGHA'S UNWAVERING ALLIANCE WITH BURMESE MILITARY

¶5. (C) Among his various meetings with GOB officials and supporters, Pinheiro described his encounter with the senior abbots of the State Sangha as the most surprising. In particular, he was disturbed by "the ease with which these monks demonized their brothers." Several abbots referred to those monks that participated in the September protests as not being authentic monks. They continued that the protesting monks did not respect the rules of the Sangha or Buddha, which emphasized apolitical involvement in Burmese society. Pinheiro claimed the Sangha further demonstrated their resolute support for the Burmese military junta by calling the protesting monks "renegades." Overall, they expressed no sympathy for the fate of those monks detained in September and October.

ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

¶6. (C) Pinheiro did not believe that the Burmese junta was ready to release political prisoners or to begin serious efforts to open up the political process. Overall, he did not have as optimistic an impression about the current situation in Burma as had been described in press reports following the visit of UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari

November 3-8. However, he was also quick to point out that he did not believe economic sanctions were the most appropriate response from the international community. In his opinion, sanctions could be effective when they were universally applied, but when an entire region (read: Asia) disagreed with the concept of sanctions against Burma, sanctions could not have the desired outcome. When asked what forms of pressure, besides sanctions, should be applied to the junta, Pinheiro had no clear answer. He only reiterated that he personally did not approve of the use of sanctions as a bargaining tool with the Burmese generals.

17. (C) During his two day stopover in Bangkok, Pinheiro also held a bilateral meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Thailand Zhang Jiuhan. While he did not provide details of their conversation, Pinheiro told the assembled group of Western diplomats that he wished the international community's approach on Burma was closer to that of China's quiet diplomacy. Pinheiro did not comment on his morning meetings with Thai Foreign minister Nitya Pibulsonggram or with ASEAN diplomats, or about what he expected from his meeting with NGOs working on Burma, which was scheduled for November 17.

BANGKOK 00005880 003.2 OF 003

18. (C) The rest of Pinheiro's briefing to Western diplomats tracked with what he told the Ambassador during their lunch just prior (ref A). This included:

- The junta wants a return to status quo;
- The international community should not isolate the junta, but rather investigate options for more positive engagement;
- It was too early to discuss numbers; his was not a full-fledged fact finding mission;
- He did not meet with any military officials, nor did he request to see General Than Shwe;
- His request to visit Aung San Suu Kyi was denied with no explanation;
- He received good cooperation from the Rangoon police commander; received arrest records, met with political prisoners (without listening devices, as far as he could discern);
- He collected valuable information for his report to the UN High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR); and
- He had useful meetings with monks at monasteries that had been raided during protests.

COMMENT

19. (C) Pinheiro's briefing to Western diplomats offered some additional insight into his recent trip to Burma, though he appeared more restrained in his condemnation of the regime's behavior than he had during his lunch with the Ambassador (ref A). The breadth of issues that he touched on in both meetings, including the prospects of ICRC's return to Burma, suggest that under the circumstances he was able to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time.

ENTWISTLE